



Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs

Representative Mohamud Noor, Chair
Human Services Finance Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
February 9, 2023

Dear Chair Noor and Committee Members

On behalf of the Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs (MACMHP), I am sending this letter to support Representative Bierman's House File 564 – increased funding for the school-linked mental health program.

The Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs (MACMHP) is the state's leading association for Community Mental Health Programs, representing 35 community-based mental health providers and agencies across the state. Our mission is to serve all who come to us seeking mental and chemical health services, regardless of their insurance status, ability to pay or where they live. As Essential Community Providers, we serve primarily culturally diverse, low-income, uninsured and public healthcare program insured Minnesotans, who cannot access services elsewhere. We serve our clients with comprehensive and coordinated care.

The majority of MACMHP member community mental health programs are partner providers in the school-linked mental health program. MACMHP members co-locate mental health professionals/ therapists within partner schools, providing direct therapy services to children. Providers also function as part of the school team -following up with school staff, teaching staff skills for identifying a student's symptoms and de-escalation techniques, coordinating services with school leadership, follow up/ transition of services for students to access more intensive services in our clinic. The school-linked mental health grant allows our member agencies to work with school staff, coordinate care, deliver services to students without insurance or with very high out of pocket expenses. This grant allows us serve children and families beyond the walls of clinics' sites. This flexibility helps our clients greatly.

We increasingly see the mental health needs of children and families are spiking as they are dealing with the trauma of the pandemic and the countless unanswered questions about how to maintain economic stability, personal safety and a sense of future. As needs are spiking in community life, capacity to meet those needs is increasingly imperiled.

By its nature, School-Linked Mental Health was designed to remove barriers students had to accessing mental health support. The service specifically focuses on serving children and families who are otherwise not able to access mental health. Not surprisingly, with the onset of the pandemic, barriers only became more significant for children and families who were School-Linked Mental Health clients. These challenges are compounded by significant payment delays for care provided. As a result, School-Linked Mental Health providers are at significant risk of not being able to sustain their current infrastructure to continue to serve students and families. Prior to COVID and now post, the greatest challenge for providers is recruitment and retention of mental health counselors. Providers are seeking all lifelines for a more durable solution that will allow them to prepare to deliver critical mental health support. The School-linked mental health program is a key component of our community mental health care system.

Please support increasing funding to the program and House File 564. Thank you for your consideration and support of the mental health needs of our children and families.

Sincerely

Jin Lee Palen, Executive Director
Minnesota Association of Community Mental Health Programs | MACMHP